



TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL

Start Talking While Your Children Are Young

Many parents make the mistake of waiting until their child is driving or in high school before talking about the problems and responsibilities associated with alcohol use.

While it is important to discuss alcohol use with teenagers, recent studies show that many attitudes about alcohol and other drugs are formed much earlier in a child's life. In fact, close to 50 percent of fourth through sixth graders report pressure from other students to try alcohol. By the time they're 12 years old, a growing number of children can name the brand of alcohol they want to drink.

Most children have their first alcohol or other drug experience between the ages of 10 and 14. That's why it's so important that you begin to talk openly and naturally about alcohol and other drugs with your child between kindergarten and grade three. That way, they'll be more likely to accept your views, information

and beliefs rather than relying on their peers or media such as music, television, or movies.

Teach children how and when to say "no"

Using or not using alcohol and other drugs is a decision – a decision that children are being forced to make at an increasingly early age. That's why it's so important to teach young children decision-making skills as early as possible.

Help your child practice ahead of time so they'll know what to say when someone confronts them about alcohol or other drugs. Tell them that although you expect them to refuse, you understand that saying "no" is difficult – even for adults.

To begin, work with your child to develop responses to the following questions and situations until they feel comfortable. Don't just tell them what to say and then expect them to parrot you. Help them to think of answers to these scenarios:

- › What would you do if some older kids came up to you at school and offered you some marijuana? What would you say to them?
- › What could you say if you've finished baby-sitting and Mr. Jones wants to bring you home, but he's been drinking?
- › What would you say if your friends offered you some beer? What would you say if they called you a chicken or a baby? Help your child come up with appropriate responses such as: "No thanks, not tonight," "My dad would ground me," or just plain "No." Take time to listen and show concern. By practicing the right answers ahead of time, chances are they'll actually use

them when a situation comes up.

Set boundaries

Children are less likely to use alcohol and drugs if they know it is unacceptable to their parents. This means telling your child what you expect of them and what the consequences will be if they don't meet these expectations. Try using this four- step process:

1. Have in mind exactly what you expect. Both parents should be in agreement on expectations. For health and legal reasons, we recommend advocating no use of illegal drugs, and no use of alcohol until of legal age.
2. Sit down with your child and tell them what you expect and why. Make sure they understand. Let them know you are serious.
3. Tell your child what will happen if they don't honor your expectations. Choose consequences that are immediate and important to your child.
4. Be prepared to follow through. Be realistic about consequences. If you make them too severe, you may be reluctant to impose them. Consistency is more important than severity.

Getting help if you need it

There may be someone in your home or family who is unable to control their drinking. A list of treatment programs in Vermont can be found at the Vermont Department of Health website at (<http://healthvermont.gov>) in the Alcohol and Drug Abuse section.



Together we can talk about alcohol.

For more information please visit the Vermont Department of Health website at:

<http://healthvermont.gov>